

The back o six in the morn, an ay twa hours tae ging afore sunrise. The loon teen his usual, weel kent route ower the pairks tae the edge o the moss. The air wes sae caul the first pucklie breaths actually hurt fan he drew them in, but they felt braw oniewey. Weel kent silhouettes rose afore him an passed awa ahin. A tree, a finnock or the tumbled down byre. Efter half an hour he staired tae mak oot the auld half-rotten bogie pairtlt swallowed in aneath a clump o rowans, an just visible in the half-licht. A rabbit rose fae a clump o girse an bolted atwards it. He crept up tae the bogie an scimmered in aneath. Caain canny, he raxed his airm down intae ane o the burrows. His fingers groaped around strugglin tae get a haud o the canvas package, howpin it would ay be far he left it. Findin it, he pulled hissel oot an back ontae his hurdies an unwrapped the sackin. Afore his een could pick oot onie shape fae the mirk, he could smell the familiar mix o linseed an 3-1 oil that coated the rifle. Naebody really kent far the gun had cam fae, ainly that he wes the current custodian in a lang line o poachers. Fae ane o the pouches in his breeks, the loon teen oot the bolt for the rifle an a single round o .222 ammunition. He mynt fit his auld man said; “Nae mair nor the ae round loon. Gin ye hit the deer, ane is aa ye’ll need. Gin ye dinna, ye’ll nae get anither shot”. He slid the bolt intae the breech an run it back an fore a pucklie times. “Smooth!” he thocht. Afore movin aff he loaded the rifle an snapped on the safety catch, the quiet click seemin sae loud at he momentarily stood stock still. Anither deep breath o cauld air an he headed deeper in amun the moss.

Gin ye’r a patient chiel, ye dinna hae tae be a dandy shot tae get a roe, ye just hae tae bide yer time er the beast comes as close at ye canna miss. The loon settled down intae the same bielly bit he’d shot fae afore. He kent that afore lang a deer would likely come wi’in about thirty yairds. Pullin a wee bit scrim nettin ower him tae brak up his outline, he settled down for fit nicht turn oot tae be a lang wait. Aneath his body he layed an auld, sack covered, thermal matt - just eneuch tae insulate fae the tap o hes legs tae his chest. For aa he had on a jersey, twa sarks an a semmit ablow his jaickit, it’s aye

caul lyin oot on the moss. As the loon contemplated his extremities he teen tent o fit wes around him. A pucklie stars glimmered in the sky abeen, an a slither o the moon keikit oot fae ahin a cloud. The linties struck up their sang an the midgies were aye threatnin tae swarm. For nou though, they seemed tae entertain thirsels wi a wee ceilidh – a maist impressive 3-D reel, played oot agin the dawning colours o the sky. Nae far awa, an auld yow chaad the girse, pyin the loon nae heed iva. He glowered in atween the twa clumps o gorse tae far the roe made their way fae the neep park back intae the safety o the moss. “Aye” he thocht, “patience is a seriously cauld vertue”.

It wesna lang afore the loon thocht he could mak oot the familiar shape o a doe’s lugs twitchin ahin ane o the bushes. But in sic a licht, he kent yer een can play tricks sae he ettled tae tak a better look. Nae doubt shootin ane o the cuddies in the next park micht wuid draw ower muckle attention tae the nocturnal activities in the moss. He didna tak hes een aff the spot far he thocht the roe wes. Gently he pit his richt haun a wee bit oot tae the side an lay the palm firmly flat on the grun tae raise hisel up. As his haun sank intae a saft pile o sharny dubs he couldna help but ken fit had happened, an near sniggered aloud but didna sae as nae tae fleg the deer. The beast lifted her heid an he kent nou for siccar it wes a Roe – an for an instant his mynd wes teen aff the yom the dubs gied aff efter the fine crust gied wey. Loon an roe cocked their lugs an lifted their heids, baith ettlin tae better unnerstaun their ain situation.

Just as the loon staired tae shift his weicht ontae his left airm, a shairp pain gaed through his richt as his outstretched haun wes driven shairply doun intae the dubs by a muckle airmy style beet. He felt his hairt race, siccar he wes awa tae get a richt stiff kickin fae the gamie. Nae far fae greetin wi the pain, he cocked hes heid roun tae cry oot his surrender. But afore he could - BANG! A shot cracked oot hurlin the roe’s heid shairply intae the air afore she drapped stane deid intae the dairkness. The yow, the birds an the cuddies aa shot the craw, an ainly the midgies bade far they wes.

Nae even keikin back tae far he teen the shot fae, the loon watched a stout shadow ging fleein aff tae mak siccar he didna loss the roe. He strained his een as he saw the hunter tak oot his knife an stairt tae gralloch the beast. But wi’in seconds he had experienced a reality

check as the enormity o the situation teen ower his thochts. It wes ainly fan he got tae hes feet an glowered doun tae far he'd layin at he seen fou the blackness o the moss haed protected him. Kennin he ainly hid a pucklie minutes tae get clear, he teen haud o the nettin an the matt an slowly backed hissel ahin some gorse. The ither chiel wes nae mair nor thirty yairds awa an the loun thocht he could hear him mutterin variously "ya dancer, ya beauty" tae hisel ower an ower. Slippin farrer back doun the track, the loon varstled tae jalouse gin it wes the gamie, or anither poacher fa had the deer. But fit he kent for siccar wes he wesnae about tae speir him. Ance he wes a puckle hunner yairds awa, he teen the round fae the rifle an pit it intae hes pouch alang wi the bolt. Reachin the familiar sanctuary o the bogie, he pit the rifle back in its cover an back doun intae the burrow. "Nae roe" he thocht "but nae captured neither". He tramped ower the pairks atwards hame, his thochts haein noo turned tae breakfast.

**Steve Murdoch**